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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000865

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#) [ELECTIONS](#)
SUBJECT: KWARA GOVERNOR DEFENDS ELECTIONS

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador met with the re-elected PDP Governor of Kwara state Bukola Saraki and stressed that the USG was concerned about the conduct of the elections, violence was not acceptable, and the tribunals were critical to the final phase of the electoral process. Saraki defended the outcome of the recently concluded elections, saying that the "PDP would have won most of the elections anyway" and absolved the national leadership of the party from any blame for the "problems." He gave his assessment of the outcomes and said that his PDP party would have to avoid "interfering in the tribunal process." Saraki then promoted a meeting between Governor Yar'Adua and President Bush "so that the opposition did not get the wrong message." Saraki defended the PDP party line and pushed the importance of a Washington visit in an enthusiastic, if not belligerent, manner. In the end, though, his exhortations suggested desperation by the ruling PDP to gain the endorsement of the USG to bolster its control within Nigeria. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Ambassador called on there-elected PDP Governor of Kwara state Bukola Saraki to stress the USG position on the elections. Pointing to the serious flaws in the process, the Ambassador noted that the tribunals had become key to enhancing the credibility of the of the process. The Ambassador stressed that violence is unacceptable and that the USG is prepared to work with the next government to improve the process. The Ambassador left a copy of the statement with Saraki, who said he had seen it previously.

13. (C) Saraki admitted that the recently concluded Nigerian elections had "some lapses," but defended the outcome, saying that the "PDP would have won most of the elections anyway." He explained that the blame for the lapses rested with the Independent National Elections Commission (INEC) and with the grassroots PDP supporters. On INEC, he said that most of the rigging or logistical problems should be blamed on INEC's ad hoc staff. "They were recruited late and had little training," he said, but the INEC Chair had done "everything possible" to make the elections work. Similarly, Saraki blamed the outlandish results on the "enthusiasm and exuberance" that the PDP attracted at the local level. He said the PDP national organization had been "confident of victory" but that locally, "rigging tends to take on its own

life." He stated that, in his opinion, "the April 14 elections saw Nigeria's highest voter turnout in its history." Saraki claimed that "there are not 60 million valid voters registered," so turnout should be estimated against the "40 million real voters on the list."

14. (C) Saraki began his assessment of the elections by commenting that "we cannot defend the undefendable." He said that the roles the PDP played in Lagos and Kano were "clearly catastrophic." But, he postulated, while observers believe that the party leadership is involved, in reality it is the "local party supporters" acting on their "enthusiasm and exuberance." This is inevitable, he said, in an election where the "enthusiasm is so high." Later he expanded his list of problems, saying that "results in the South South region are indefensible." At another point, he claimed that the results in only "five states are questionable;" still later he said that results in "three states should be changed." Saraki agreed that it was important for the PDP to avoid "interfering in the tribunal process," and said the USG should not be concerned about the judiciary's independence. Still, judicial inefficiency could create a problem, he stated.

15. (C) Saraki then turned to the proposed visit of Yar'Adua to Washington and said that it was important for President Bush to receive him, "so the opposition does not get the wrong message about your support." He said that we (the USG and the PDP) did not have time on our side as the swearing in would take place in three weeks and the G-8 summit would take place two weeks later, reemphasizing that it was important for the USG to facilitate a meeting as soon as possible. The opposition does not matter, he claimed, because in "two weeks everything will be calm anyway." He stressed that the USG needed to work with the PDP and "not encourage the opposition" because "nothing can be done anyway." "We just

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need to move on," he stressed. Besides, he continued, "look at the three candidates. Yar'Adua is the only good democrat and he is the best that we have." "He is the President and he will be sworn in. You should get on board and move forward with us," he concluded.

16. (C) COMMENT: Saraki is posing as a Yar'Adua insider, and, indeed, we have evidence that the Governor is turning to him for advice. Saraki defended the PDP party line without wavering. He also stressed the importance of a Washington visit in an enthusiastic, if not belligerent, manner. He was clearly worried that the opposition might think they could challenge the results of the elections and gain international support and stressed the importance of the PDP, in partnership with the USG, moving ahead with their plans. In the end, though, his exhortations suggest the level of desperation within the ruling PDP to gain the endorsement of the USG is rising as they seek to bolster their control of the aftermath of the April events.
CAMPBELL